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MEMORANDUM

Special Assessments on the Middle East Situation

POSTWAR LEADERSHIP OF THE ARAB BLOC

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

1 August 1967

Postwar Leadership of the Arab Bloc

1. The recent Arab-Israeli war has occasioned significant changes in the relative positions and influence of the principal Arab leaders. Prior to the hostilities, Nasir's personal stature, together with Egypt's military power and its importance as the largest and wealthiest Arab state, enabled the Egyptian leader to call the shots on moves respecting Arab policy toward Israel. This was particularly true in the weeks just prior to the war when Cairo's decisions on mobilization and on closing the Strait of Tiran were supported both verbally and materially by most Arab leaders, even though some of them at least recognized that there were serious risks involved in the course Egypt was taking.

2. Since the war, various Arab leaders have been expounding notably different lines of argument on the Israeli problem. Nasir is but one voice among many. The crushing defeat suffered by the Egyptian military forces has now made other Arabs unready to accept him as principal Arab spokesman. Nasir now appears to be aware that the Arabs in general, and the Egyptians in particular, are unable to deal with the Israelis militarily. His speech on 23 July was cautious and moderate in this respect. It expressed a sober determination to rebuild and pointedly eschewed any calls for a new round of warfare against Israel. The Egyptian press and radio over the last month or so have generally reflected the same mood of determination to rebuild.

3. The most extreme statements and positions are currently coming from Damascus and Algiers. Leaders in these two capitals are calling for an imminent renewal of the struggle by means of guerilla warfare. This is no new thing for the Syrians, who have always been the most extreme of the Arabs in their attitude toward Israel. The Algerian

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leader, Boumediene, has made a vigorous and at least partially successful effort to seize the limelight as a principal Arab spokesman. He is apparently genuinely appalled at the Arab collapse after less than seven days of fighting compared with Algeria's seven years of guerrilla warfare against the French. He has attended meetings in Cairo and Damascus, has made two trips to Moscow, and apparently shares a common appreciation of the Israeli problem with the Syrians.

4. Nasir's generally sober and realistic view is close to that of Jordan's King Husayn. The two leaders are agreed on the necessity to construct a common and cautious Arab policy in respect to Israel. For this reason the two are urging the early convening of an Arab summit conference. Algeria and Syria oppose them in this effort largely because they fear that they could not prevent a summit conference from taking a prudent line vis-a-vis Israel.

5. In addition to this division between extremists and more cautious leaders over Israel, other fractures in the Arab world still persist. The Egyptians reduced their troop strength in Yemen during the war, but they still have about 25,000 there. There are no indications of further withdrawals. In fact, the Egyptians have resumed bombing, including gas attacks, in the last few weeks.

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At the other end of the Arab world, Morocco, which made gestures of support during the Arab-Israeli war, is most concerned that Algeria might use its heavily armed forces against Morocco, although there is no evidence that the Algerians have any such intent at present.

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6. Most of the remaining states in the Arab world are followers, and will go along with what the majority does. A split between the extremists on the Arab-Israeli issue (Algeria and Syria) and the more moderates (Jordan and Egypt), however, could cause some problems for the others. The Sudan tends to follow Egypt's lead. Iraq, which was publicly pro-Nasir and anti-Syrian Baath in the past year, is making appropriate noises about a new round of fighting. Its new government, containing pro-Nasirites, ex-Baathis, and "Iraqi-firsters," is, however, an unknown quantity and is likely to feel under some pressure to follow Nasir's lead. At the same time, Baghdad probably feels it must defer to some extent to Syrian sensibilities because of its dependence on Syrian good will to export the bulk of its oil. Kuwait tries to please all parties in the Arab world, but in recent years it has respected and feared Nasir far more than it has the Syrians.

7. The Arab foreign ministers' conference convened in Khartoum on 1 August. The conduct of affairs at this conference will almost certainly give some clues as to the likelihood of the summit conference being held and the general tenor of events at that conference. All things considered, there is probably about an even chance that this summit conference will meet, although there are almost certainly to be a few Arab leaders absent. Bourguiba is ill and has a valid excuse for not going; Idris rarely moves out of Libya; and Faysal may boycott it unless he sees some chance of the Egyptians adopting a less active role in Yemen.

8. One factor which will weigh heavily in Arab deliberations is the appreciation which Nasir and other principal leaders have of the level of support that the USSR is likely to afford them. The USSR continues to favor the advance of "progressive" forces in the area. At the same time, it wishes to avoid further hostilities between the Arabs and Israel. Soviet maneuvers in the UN came close to disavowing the entire Arab position in respect of Israel. If Arab leaders get the impression that the Soviet Union is not going to

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help them very much, this will tend to encourage caution and to strengthen the voice of the moderate leaders. If, on the other hand, they believe that they can count on meaningful Soviet support against Israel, then they are likely to take a stronger stand.

9. At this point, before the results of the Arab foreign ministers' conference are known, it is extremely difficult to make any judgment as to the likely outcome of an Arab summit. Certainly it would have trouble arriving at a position regarding Israel readily agreed to by all Arab states. Nasir is unlikely to dominate affairs, but no other leader is likely to do so either. There is some chance that public disagreement could emerge from this conference. The Arabs will seek to avoid this, however, and it is more likely that the public tone of whatever statements are issued will be moderately hostile in respect of Israel, if only for public consumption at home.

10. Inside a summit itself, numbers alone would seem to favor the cautionaries, with Egypt and Jordan supported by Lebanon, Sudan, Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and perhaps Iraq. But no leader would want to risk the accusation of being "soft on Israel." The Boumediene-Atassi tough position on Israel will probably win some verbal supporters, or at least intimidate some of the moderates into hardening their public postures. Yet few states, in practice, will act against their own major interests. The chances are that the existing antagonistic division of Arab states as between revolutionaries (Egypt, Algeria, Syria) and conservatives (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Libya) will come to be accompanied by an extremist versus cautious split respecting Israel. This would have a somewhat different make-up, with the former probably limited to Algeria and Syria and the latter finding Nasir and Husayn in tacit alliance, supported to varying degrees by most other states. This latter division over Israel has already adversely affected Nasir's ability to influence his fellow revolutionaries. The net

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result appears to be an Arab community with less solidarity than at any time in recent years, with Nasir's image as the symbol of revolutionary nationalism considerably tarnished, and with a minimum of three to five Arab leaders claiming, at any given time, to have the right to present the "true" Arab doctrine.

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